Preserving Electronic Mailing Lists as Scholarly Resources: The H-Net Archives

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Abstract: H-Net, an international consortium of teachers and scholars, maintains the largest and oldest collection of born-digital, contemporaneously generated, and content-moderated arts, humanities and social science material on the Internet, including more than 180 interactive e-mail lists. Although only 140 GB in size, this collection of lists includes more than one million e-mail messages.

With support from NHPRC, MATRIX, the digital humanities research center that hosts H-Net, is conducting an assessment of its preservation policies and practices and developing an improved long-term preservation plan for the H-Net lists. A review of existing practices revealed unacceptable time lapses between ingest and the calculation of message digests and inadequate security and backup policies, among other issues. As the digital archivist for this project, I will explain how I identified these weaknesses and developed a comprehensive H-Net list preservation plan. I am currently working with MATRIX's systems administrator to implement this plan, which will ensure the authenticity of messages and streamline legacy preservation activities. The plan will also demonstrate the value of a careful application of the RLG-OCLC guidelines on trusted digital repositories through the documentation of preservation policies in accordance with the Trustworthy Repositories—Audit and Certification checklist.

This close examination of the assessment and improvement processes involved in H-Net list preservation will be useful to archivists and others managing large collections of electronic records.

About the author:

In October 2007, *Lisa M. Schmidt* joined MATRIX: The Center for Humane Arts, Letters and Social Sciences Online, a digital humanities research center at Michigan State University. Her work as electronic records archivist and project manager focuses on an NHPRC-funded project to assess and improve the preservation practices for the H-Net: Humanities and Social Sciences Online academic discussion e-mail lists.
Lisa received an MS in Information Studies from the University of Texas at Austin in August 2007. Her primary area of interest is digital preservation, and project work has included the preservation of hypertext literature, born digital video, and websites. Prior to joining the information studies field, she enjoyed a successful career as a high technology marketing communications professional in the San Francisco Bay Area and Austin. She also holds a BA in history and an MBA, both from the University of Texas.